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## De stem van de student

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# Summary: the voice of the student

## *Student papers in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century*

In 1825 some students of the University of Utrecht published a student paper: *De gekortwiekte Faam*. This was a novelty: a paper for students edited by students. The professors of the academy of Utrecht condemned the initiative. They found it highly inappropriate for students to speak out for themselves. Even so, the initiative was soon followed by students of the academies in Leiden and Groningen. In the second half of the nineteenth century the student weekly had become a normal aspect of student life. This study analyses the history and development of the student paper as a genre: from the experimental first small and short-lived papers in the first half of the nineteenth century, to the institutionalized and flourishing weekly in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the historiography of the university these student papers have often been used as a source by the historian, as they include rich material to illustrate her story. The papers as a genre have not yet been the subject of study. Nevertheless, the student paper had an important function for students and student life, as I claim in this study. It did not just reflect changes in the history of student life, it actually and actively impelled ideas and reforms in student life.

In the first part of this study (chapters 1 to 5) I examine the 'development' of the student paper. Since a paper for students was without precedent, the variety between the first range of papers was enormous. Some papers resembled the so-called spectators (a very popular type of paper in the eighteenth century): they taught students all kinds of lessons through letters. Other papers provided concise overviews of exams and academic news. Several papers also included illustrations, poetry and prose of student life, whilst in other papers such kind of contributions were scarce. Some papers were local, other papers attempted to encompass all academies in the Netherlands. What they had in common, was their short existence. These student papers not only revealed a lot about student life, they actually influenced students' ideas. The student-reader learned how to behave as a student, how to dress, how to participate in society, and what to think of new education laws. Therefore these papers defined and redefined the identity of the 'genuine' student and student life. The illustrations, poetry, prose, and articles which discussed the typical aspects of student life (such as the initiation rituals, friendships, clubs) influenced student life itself. Furthermore, these papers strengthened ties among students in the Netherlands. The papers brought about a growing awareness of a national community of students.

Students' recurrent efforts to hold on to their own papers, in spite of the difficulties of publishing, reveal their opinion that a student paper was essential for them to voice their needs, and reflect their intense wish to take part in the public debate. At the same

time, as I argue in this study, the papers not only reflect this development, but actually were an 'actor' in these changes. The urge to participate in public debate was very strongly advertised by *Lucifer. Academische courant* (1850-1853). This student paper stimulated the students – just because of their status of being a student – to participate in the debate about higher education, student literature, the national student community and student life. The liberal political climate in the Netherlands just after 1848 encouraged students to speak out for themselves. *Lucifer* underlined the liberal ideas: a student paper should not publish all students' opinions, but instead represent their *voice*. A leading group, the intellectual elite of the students should enlighten the rest of the student community. Around the 1840s and 1850s the voice of the students was recognized, and also the necessity of a student paper. But the liberal ideas of *Lucifer* also included the elimination of the existing (provincial) academies in favour of the foundation of one national academy for the most talented young men (and future elite) of the Netherlands. Although the necessity of a national weekly for students was widely recognized, the unpopular idea of a national university led to the end of *Lucifer*.

The important Secondary Educational Act of 1863 made students long for a new student paper. In 1864 some students from the academies in Utrecht and Leiden published *Vox Studiosorum*, in 1871 followed by *Studenten Weekblad*. In 1875 these two student papers merged as *Vox Studiosorum/Studenten Weekblad*. In 1876 another weekly was published: *Algemeen Nederlands Studenten-Weekblad Minerva*. These national student papers existed side by side for many decades. In the second part of this dissertation (chapters 6 to 11) I examine the influence of these national student papers on student life at four different levels. In the first theme (chapter 7) I discuss the importance of these student papers in the nationalisation of the student community. On the one hand these papers *reflected* the increasing process of nationalisation. On the other hand these papers *strengthened* this process of nationalisation. Students discussed the developments in higher education. The stories of the students of the other academies made the students feel connected. They belonged to a national community. At the same time the appearance of the national student papers led to the emergence of a regional identity, and to the exclusion of some students who were not considered to be 'genuine'. ('Genuine' students were those who studied at a state university, not those who studied at a Polytechnical School). After a lot of discussion these students were finally accepted.

In the second theme (chapter 8) I analyse the relationship between the student paper and the other student periodical that emerged in the nineteenth century: the student almanac (the official annual of the students' corps). A close look reveals a complex link between the national paper and the local almanac (which was seen as a status symbol of the students' corps). In the third theme (chapter 9) I reflect how the national student papers – dominated by liberals – tried to bring about unity in the (national) student community. Therefore, students had to interact with each other. They had to join the students' corps and they needed to visit the clubs. Religious and political beliefs were supposed to be of secondary importance. Actually, the mingling of all these principals and beliefs would cultivate and polish the students as the *spes patriae*. This would make them ready to fulfil

their position in society after they had finished their studies. In the fourth theme (chapter 10) I argue that these ideals of unity and 'genuine' student life were under threat. Some students doubted the necessity of joining students' clubs for example, while others protested against the preached indifference to political, social and economic developments. New national laws allowing students to vote (in 1867 in church, in 1887 in politics) led to new debates in the national papers.

The discussions in national student papers about the necessity for students to dedicate their time and effort to political and social work forced students to reconsider their ideas about 'genuine' student life. *Vox Studiosorum/Studenten Weekblad* and *Minerva* remained very strict in their beliefs as to what should and what should not be published in a student paper. For some students – as I discuss in the third part of this study (chapters 12 to 15) – the unwillingness of the national student papers to reform and to adjust made these students decide to publish new student papers. In Amsterdam and Delft students published new student papers that can be characterized as socialist (for example, *Stemmen* and *In den Nevel*). These papers defined the student in a new way. Because the student had all the opportunities to serve society, it was his duty to do so. These new student papers evoked a new way of student life. They attacked the traditional way of student life and the established student papers. Students of the other academies tried to elevate the debate about these questions in *Vox* and *Minerva*.

At the same time new groups of students published their own student papers to give voice to their beliefs and opinions about student life. The aforementioned educational laws in the second half of the nineteenth century created opportunities for the middle class. These students lacked the classical education of the Dutch elite, they also lacked the money to participate in the rather expensive student life (the costs to join the students' corps were significant). Therefore they founded their own unions and also their own papers. In these papers they discussed their ideas regarding student life. Actually, these papers gave voice to a large number of students who were ignored by the dominant students' corps and the established papers. They contributed to the emancipation of these new groups of students in the national student community.

The emancipatory effect of the student paper is also clearly illustrated by the case of female students entering the academies at the end of the nineteenth century. The male dominated student paper forced the female students to publish their own paper: *Utrechtsch Maandblad voor Vrouwelijke Studenten* (1910). It lasted for two years. The developments in student life pressed the national student papers to abandon their one-sided position. All students should participate in *Minerva*. Therefore the female students were asked to give up their own student paper and join *Minerva*. The female students agreed, but it is striking that some female students were convinced that the emancipation of female students was served best by the preservation of their own student paper. The attendance of a female and a non-member of the students' corps in the editorial staff of *Minerva* led to the withdrawal of those students who still wanted to believe that the identity of a 'genuine' student could not correspond to any non-student-like characteristics such as politics, socialistic ideas, membership of a union or being a female. They founded a student paper of their own.

In the end, the national student paper lost the central role which it had played for several decades. It was no coincidence that the founding of new papers in Amsterdam and Delft occurred after a growth of student populations in these cities. These local student papers illustrated and confirmed that they were equal to state universities. These new student papers did not represent the student population in general, something which the national student papers had claimed for several decades. They actually reflected the differential character of student life at the end of the nineteenth century. This development was also visible in the student press itself: not only the different groups of students founded their own student paper, the specialization in higher education brought about a lot of different types of papers (such as faculty papers and scientific papers). It was a trend that continued into the twentieth century. The First World War made students again long for a strong community. For example, students in Groningen published a new student paper that included all students. This paper developed into an academic weekly in the second half of the twentieth century, a paper for the academic community as a whole. These developments in the student press not only reflect important changes in academic life, they have also pushed the academic community in a specific direction. The way in which a university represents itself reflects the identity of the university itself.